



Press Release

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MARINE DEBRIS ENDANGERS ANOTHER HUMPBACK WHALE

NOAA announces another humpback whale was successfully disentangled by the Hawaiian Islands Whale Disentanglement Network, a group of trained professional disentanglement experts. This is the second successful disentanglement of five confirmed life threatening entanglements reported to NOAA Fisheries Service Hotline this season.

The whale was entangled in over 100 lbs of 1" diameter line wrapped several times around the animal's tail stock (where the tail shaft meets the fluke) that provided considerable drag and caused the lines to cut into the animal's body.

The adult female humpback was first reported to the NOAA Fisheries Hotline on January 29 by the Hawaii Marine Mammal Consortium, a whale research organization. The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, NOAA's Pacific Islands Regional Office, and the United States Coast Guard have been looking for this whale since then. Unfortunately, the animal was not resighted and the rescue effort was put on hold.

On March 5, over a month later, staff of the Dolphin Institute, a nonprofit whale research organization, spotted the animal off the leeward side of West Maui and stood by it until the sanctuary's response vessels arrived on scene. Using the process of "kegging" the animal down by attaching large polyball buoys to the trailing gear, the rescue team was able to safely free the animal from the life threatening entanglement.

"There is an alarming trend of marine mammals entangled in marine debris," said David Schofield, Marine Mammal Response Network Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries Service. "Although we have successfully disentangled these two whales, our focus should be on stopping the source of these entanglements - marine debris."

NOAA Fisheries Service, along with partners from federal, state and county agencies, not-for-profit organizations, industry, businesses, and community members have removed almost 550 tons of marine debris from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The project began in 1996 in an effort to reduce entanglement rates of critically endangered Hawaiian monk seals. In 2006 there are five ongoing marine debris projects in Hawaii. The latest project brings the cleanup effort to the main Hawaiian Islands and involves using aerial surveys to spot and document marine debris from the nearshore waters of the Big Island and Kauai.

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If you believe you have seen an entangled whale, please call the NOAA Fisheries Hotline at **(888) 256-9840** as soon as possible. “Personnel who are part of Hawaii’s disentanglement team are federally permitted and expertly trained to undertake these activities”, said Schofield. “The process of disentangling a large free swimming whale is extremely dangerous and rescuers never enter the water. Never take it upon yourself to attempt to disentangle a whale.”

**High quality, dramatic photos of the rescue operation available by request.
Contact Keeley.Belva@noaa.gov.**

The Hawaiian Islands Whale Disentanglement Network is a community-based consortium of Federal, State and non-profit organizations working collaboratively to save whales from life threatening entanglements. The network was founded in 2003 by David Mattila, the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary’s Science and Rescue Coordinator, and is co-managed by Ed Lyman, the Sanctuary’s Marine Mammal Response Manager. The Network works alongside NOAA’s Pacific Islands Regional Office and receives authorization from the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (permit #932-1489-08).

NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) seeks to increase the public awareness of America’s maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, 13 national marine sanctuaries encompass more than 18,000 square miles of America’s ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources. In addition, the NMSP is conducting a sanctuary designation process to incorporate the Northwest Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve into the National Marine Sanctuary System.

NOAA’s Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaii. The sanctuary emphasizes research, education and community-based resource protection in a diverse set of conservation programs across the state. NOAA and DLNR work as partners in co-managing the sanctuary, which encompasses 1,370 square miles of coastal waters off portions of Kauai, Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Maui and Hawaii.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary:

<http://www.hihwnms.nos.noaa.gov/>

NOAA’s Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://www.hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>